

Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Revenue Committee

Final Meeting Summary

November 17, 1998

Committee members present: Skip Rowley, Chair, Roger Dormaier, Councilmember Dave Earling, Governor Booth Gardner, Robert Helsell, Dale Nusbaum, , Commissioner Judy Wilson

Committee members absent: Tim Ceis, Representative Ed Murray, Larry Pursley, Neil Peterson, Senator Eugene Prince

Chairman Skip Rowley welcomed members and asked them to introduce themselves. He remarked that today's briefings did not directly relate to the Revenue Committee. It was noted that topics relevant to funding were to be on the agenda on December 14. The adoption of the October 7 meeting summary was moved and seconded and approved unanimously by committee members.

Review of Morning Briefings

Committee members made the following observations and suggestions about the morning briefings:

It would be helpful if briefing materials could be mailed out to commission members in advance of meetings.

The attitudes of the voting public of eastern and central Washington need to be factored into polling data.

The Washington Transportation Alliance (WTA) recently held a meeting with regional planning organizations in Yakima. A synopsis is available from WTA. The group learned about the potential effects of dam removal on barge commerce and impacts on roadways if the goods are displaced from the waterway to the road system. In Whitman County the "congestion problem" is moving the agricultural product.

Members commented that it remains to be seen what effect the long term bonding will have on the state's ability to be flexible in allocating resources.

Benefits of transportation initiatives need to be seen statewide. For example, eastern Washington legislators are beginning to see how Puget Sound issues, especially access to the ports, benefit them.

Mistrust of the “system” is part of the problem. The WSDOT audit was an expression of that. A member noted that the construction industry is regularly challenged by WSDOT engineers to do good work and WSDOT generally runs a good show. Polling data show that people believe the system is well run and that it is the elected officials people mistrust.

For many parts of the state, communities have to let roads deteriorate to the point where they can qualify for grant funds to repair them. The state needs to look at how it can distribute funds to take better care of basic maintenance. Liability claims are also a huge cost to government. The impact of the salmon listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is also coming. Stormwater plans could add huge new costs to transportation.

Members noted that presenters were unprepared to offer suggestions for improvement. It was commented that with many policy makers in the audience, presenters might be reluctant to be forthcoming with ideas. For the next briefing day, speakers should be asked for their suggestions.

The area of environmental cost has been barely touched on. It was mentioned that on some projects as much as one-third of the cost is environment related. The issues of environmental permitting fall into the purview of the Administration Committee.

Techniques such as wetland banking are now being used but that does not necessarily reduce the cost of mitigation.

Additional information and research was requested by members:

- Information on Washington’s ranking compared to other states in per-mile construction costs, overhead costs, costs of planning and design.
- The WSDOT performance audit and its findings on potential cost savings.
- Any history of more balanced revenue schemes including user fees and congestion fees.
- Information on what other countries are doing.
- Information on who is making decisions and how. What power does the LTC have to change the prioritized list? When does the list get made and who can change it?
- R-49 and its impact on voter attitudes to raising gas taxes. It raised a lot of money without raising gas taxes – what does that mean to the future of raising the gas tax?